

state employees and that at least 20 percent of the state employees pay part of their monthly health insurance premium, do have the high option and 90 percent of those enrollees are...20 percent of the high option, 90 percent of the enrollees are the high option. And I know, too, that the state employees don't have any dental insurance coverage. These are some of the things that the city and local government, county government, do give the state employees and I would like to ask Senator Wesely a question, at least one. Senator Wesely, do the state employees have disability insurance. In other words, if they become disabled, are they allowed to carry on in the state insurance program?

SENATOR WESELY: No.

SENATOR LABEDZ: And they don't have the option of continuing the health insurance at their own expense right now when they retire before the age of 65, do they?

SENATOR WESELY: With the exception of the State Patrol, you are right.

SENATOR LABEDZ: Okay, and, Senator Wesely, I only ask these questions because I want to be sure that this is what is happening, that we are going to reduce the benefits for the state employees, and when you look at the cities and counties and the health insurance program that they give their employees, I don't think it is right that we go and reduce the benefits of the state employees. That is part of their package as Senator Warner said. The salary and the fringe benefits go together. I worked for the state for 7 1/2 years and I know that there are a lot of things in the program right now, like the retired employees that are forced to retire, say, at the age of 60 because of some disability, and I did introduce a bill with Senator Pappas this year trying to keep them in the program until they, of course, go on Medicare, and at this point, they are not able to do that even if they pay the entire premium themselves. I think our insurance program that we have for state employees should be upgraded rather than downgraded and I certainly will not support any amendment that will take away some of their fringe benefits. Thank you.

SPEAKER NICHOL: Senator Lowell Johnson, then Senator DeCamp, then Senator Chizek.